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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that determined the benefits of mentoring as part of an administrator preparation program are discussed in this paper. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine practicing administrators, who worked directly with aspiring administrators who served as candidates in one cycle of the Danforth Foundation Program for the Preparation of School Principals. Mentors reported that they derived considerable personal satisfaction from participating in the program and identified the ability to "be a teacher again" as one of the most satisfying aspects. Contact with aspiring administrators exposed mentors to ideas from other school systems and to recent research. Finally, mentors viewed their mentoring role as an affirmation of their professional competence. Findings suggest that the mentoring role may be inherently satisfying and provide inservice education to practitioners. (Contains 12 references.) (LMI)

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BENEFITS OF A MENTORING PROGRAM FOR ASPIRING ADMINISTRATORS

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BENEFITS OF A MENTORING PROGRAM FOR ASPIRING ADMINISTRATORS

The designation of individuals to serve as mentors in innovative principal preparation programs is well-established. Since the Danforth Foundation initiated its support for the development of approaches to leadership development which went beyond traditional university-based efforts in 1987, the reliance on experienced school leaders to assist newcomers has been increasingly popular. School leadership development has followed the widely-held assumptions of private sector management (Kram, 1985; Zey, 1985), namely that experienced managers should offer support to the development of aspiring and beginning managers and other less-experienced colleagues. In general, recent developments in professional education have promoted mentoring for classroom teachers (Zimpher & Reiger, 1988) and school administrators (Daresh & Playko, 1988).

The exact nature of mentoring schemes to support administrative development consistent with the Danforth Foundation vision has differed greatly across the 24 university sites associated with the program during the past six years. However, a number of assumptions and practices seem to have been embraced at all sites. For example, it was accepted that programs would emphasize learning through experience rather than simply

through the accumulation of graduate credits in traditional university courses. Second, all local adaptations of the Danforth Foundation agenda attempted to make certain that positive and collaborative relationships were formed with local school systems as the basis of any effort.

A third common ingredient has been the designation of individual school administrators to serve as ongoing mentors to the candidates selected for participation in each local effort. Relationships formed between aspiring educational leaders and their mentors were believed to serve as a central activity leading to effective leadership preparation. In this paper, we examine this assumption, not to determine whether aspiring administrators were assisted by mentors, but rather to look at the apparent effect that serving as a mentor had on the mentors themselves. We begin by reviewing some of the assumptions supporting the concept of mentorship. Next, we describe our recent study which looked at the types of benefits perceived by administrative mentors in one Danforth Program. We conclude with some implications for improved practice that might be derived from the research.

Administrative Mentoring

Proposals for improving the ways in which educational personnel are prepared have recently offered suggestions that parallel the foci of Danforth Programs. Field-based learning

and the use of mentors to guide professional development have been suggested as ways in which newcomers to educational leadership might be brought "on board" more effectively. Recent literature has focused on issues associated with the preservice preparation and more recently, induction of classroom teachers. At present, research-based and theory-driven descriptions of the ways in which people assume leadership roles are rare. This has led to either a lack of material associated with leadership preparation issues or efforts to apply knowledge through analyses of teacher education to the world of administration.

With regard to the former issue--the paucity of research related to administrative preparation--things are changing. Work such as the review of preparation programs carried out by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (Thompson, 1993) has served to intensify interest on how people become school leaders. Indeed, the presence of efforts such as the Danforth Program has encouraged researchers to cast serious glances at the field of administrator preparation.

The second trend--relying on teacher education to define the field of administrator preparation--is more problematic. While there are overlaps between teacher preparation and administrator preparation, there are limitations on trying to transfer practice from one field to the other. This is true of discussions related to mentoring programs for teachers and ad-

ministrators. We recently identified at least four characteristics of school administration that make it inappropriate to apply teacher education schemes to the world of aspiring principals and other administrators (Daresh & Playko, 1989):

1. The knowledge base related to effective teaching behavior is more developed than it is for administrative behavior. As a result, there are more guidelines that may be used by teacher mentors than administrative mentors to guide the development of proteges.

2. Norms exist that make it harder for practicing administrators than teachers to admit their need for assistance through mentoring programs. It is normally quite difficult for principals or superintendents to ask mentors for help because doing so might be viewed by peers as a sign of weakness or even incompetence.

3. New administrators are not new to schools. Consequently, the focus of mentorship as a way to introduce people to the basic routines and practices associated with the daily life of schools is not a priority in administrative mentoring programs.

4. An assumption in mentoring programs for teachers is that teachers are able to engage in many daily informal contacts with peers. The same is not true of administrators who might not see administrative colleagues for days at a time.

Despite these limitations, there are benefits in the use of mentoring that are found in any field, whether in classroom teaching or school administration. Mentorship is assumed to have at least two potential applications for improving ways in which professional development (at the preservice, induction, or inservice levels) is provided to school leaders. The first of these is related to identifying individuals to serve as appropriate role models for other administrators. Frequently, the term mentor is assigned to any experienced administrator who happens to be available to answer the questions of colleagues. Such individuals may evolve into mentors for the administrators with whom they work, however, being a sponsor or role model is by no means the same as mentoring in ways administrators need for part of their ongoing professional development. We believe someone should work with administrators to describe procedures, policies, and normal practices in a school or district. It is also critical that someone provide feedback to colleagues regarding the extent to which they successfully perform the technical skills associated with carrying out an administrative role.

A second potential value of mentoring as part of a program for the professional development of school administrators is found in its application as part of a process that we refer to as "professional formation" (Daresh & Playko, 1992). This is

one portion of what we see as three equal parts of professional development. The others are "academic preparation" (where the theory of administration is presented), and "field-based learning" (the acquisition of technical skills while actually being in the "hot seat"). Mentoring is essential here because individuals are able to clarify their personal visions of what educational leadership means and develop a sense of commitment to a career in administration. The type of personalized coaching and feedback that is part of an effective mentoring relationship serves as the foundation for professional formation.

A review of literature provides some additional insights into the values normally associated with formal mentoring programs. Clutterbuck (1991) looked at peer coaching in a variety of private corporations and identified three major sets of benefits derived by individuals who serve as mentors: improved job satisfaction, increased peer recognition, and potential career advancement.

Perhaps the greatest number of rewards for mentors have traditionally been found in the area of improved job satisfaction. Here, mentors in private corporations have reported that grooming a promising new executive is a challenging and stimulating personal experience, particularly if the mentor has reached a point in his or her own career where a lot of the earlier "excitement" is disappearing.

Mentors also indicated that their experiences were "worth it" because they enjoyed increased recognition from peers. In private business, a mentor who identifies promising employees often acquires a reputation for having the type of insights into the needs of the company that should be rewarded.

Finally, mentors have also indicated that they found satisfaction in their role because it often provided them with opportunities for personal career advancement. In this regard, a major pay-off has been described in terms of the mentor benefitting from the energy and enthusiasm of their proteges. Mentors who have been attentive to the potential of those with whom they interact have been able to capitalize on a new source of knowledge, insight, and talent, and this may have been translated into personalized forms of growth and professional development.

In short, there is information regarding the value of mentoring in private business and some research related to benefits often derived by those who have been mentored. Absent from the literature are descriptions related to the benefits realized by individuals who served as mentors in programs designed to prepare educational leaders.

Study Methods

This study involved the use of in-depth interviews with a group of practicing administrators who worked directly with

aspiring administrators who served as candidates in one cycle of the Danforth Foundation Program for the Preparation of School Principals. The mentors had been specialized training prior to beginning their work (Playko & Daresh, 1988). The questions posed during the interviews focused on the extent to which mentors' expectations prior to the beginning of the program were realized during its first year of operation.

Data were derived from responses to interviews with nine practicing administrators identified by Danforth candidates as the most frequently consulted during the year. Each person selected for intensive interviewing had been recognized by at least five (of 17) candidates who participated in the program as an administrator consulted on at least three occasions during the school year. This was selected as a criterion of mentoring effectiveness because no minimal or maximum number of contacts between mentors and candidates were prescribed as part of the program. Rather, candidates were free to select and make contact with a pool of administrative mentors. Thus, anyone consulted on a number of occasions by a variety of candidates could be classified as someone who was perceived as particularly helpful or effective. The number of contacts between candidates and mentors was seen as a reasonable measure of successful mentoring.

Findings

The findings from this study paralleled the results of similar studies of mentors and proteges in non-educational settings (Daloz, 1986; Murray & Owen, 1991):

1. **Administrative mentors reported considerable personal satisfaction derived from participation in the program.**

As further confirmation of this, each person interviewed specified that he or she would willingly serve as a mentor again in a similar program, without any form of compensation. Working with the candidates had been a personally rewarding experience that people wanted to replicate in the future.

2. **One of the most satisfying aspects of working as a mentor was the ability to "be a teacher" again.**

A persistent frustration felt by many school administrators is that a trade-off associated with their move out of the classroom is that they are no longer able to work directly with students, at least not in the positive ways in which they used to work as teachers. Being designated as a mentor to work with a group of administrative candidates was a way for people to be able to work with students once again. They expressed a sense of personal and professional fulfillment by being able to watch their learning and professional development take place around them. As one mentor noted,

> I really enjoyed working with the candidates who came out to visit me. It was fun to have a chance to visit with some enthusiastic beginners...some people really eager to learn. The questions that they asked me really caused me to step back and think about what I was doing.

3. **Contact with candidates exposed mentors to ideas from other systems.**

Mentors reported that working with aspiring candidates from a variety of local school systems enabled them to have contact with ideas and practices taking place in other school districts. More often than not, such opportunities for hearing about good practices in other settings were not available to practicing administrators who were confined to their buildings or districts by their ongoing responsibilities. One principal mentor observed, "They [the candidates] were the eyes and ears around the schools of the county."

4. **Mentors learned about recent research from the candidates.**

Because the Danforth candidates were also enrolled in graduate university courses at the same time that they worked with their mentors, they were able to bring the findings of recent educational research "out in the field." A considerable amount of sharing and discussion related to the things that the candidates had learned at the university often served as central features of contact between mentors and candidates. This

enabled many practicing administrators to be exposed to material and ideas that would not typically be available to them during the course of their normal duties. Two mentors specifically remarked that one of the best features of the Danforth program was that they had access to a type of ongoing inservice that was provided by the candidates who came along "loaded with fresh ideas."

5. **Administrators designated as Danforth mentors viewed that as an affirmation of their professional competence.**

One important observation made by each mentor was that serving in their roles made them feel good about their own value to the local school system that nominated them for the program in the first place. In short, serving as a mentor was considered to be an implicit endorsement of the effective performance and professional competence of the participating administrators.

Discussion and Summary

Mentoring programs for administrators are likely to become increasingly popular as they are seen as ways to bring people on board as effective leaders (Daresh & Playko, 1989). In this respect, professional education is apparently engaging in the same type of activities described as effective in management development for private industries. The implementation of men-

toring programs as activities common to all Danforth programs, as well as other similar efforts to improve the ways in which individuals are made ready to assume educational leadership roles, are understandable. There is an assumed value in mentoring to help aspiring administrators learn their craft more completely.

Our findings suggest two more things. First, the effects of mentoring activities are felt not only by proteges but, perhaps more importantly by those who serve as mentors. This needs to be recognized as mentoring programs are being planned and implemented. There is often a concern that proper incentives need to be identified as a way to encourage individuals to serve as mentors. The assumption in many cases has been that some type of financial reward is always necessary to encourage helping behaviors. Our findings do not reject the need to consider such approaches. However, we suspect that the fact is often ignored that simply serving as a mentor may often be its own best reward.

The second issue that emerges from this study is that encouraging experienced school administrators to serve as mentors to either aspiring or beginning colleagues may be a powerful approach to inservice education for practitioners. Our study suggested that individuals who had contact with talented newcomers easily learned as much as they taught.

In this paper we presented a description of our study in which a group of practicing school administrators perceived their involvement as mentors in an innovative principal preparation program. It was believed that the involvement of experienced practitioners in such a program was critical because it would be beneficial to aspiring administrators. What we discovered was that mentoring often appears to parallel benefits to both mentors and proteges. Further, we learned more about the precise nature of the benefits achieved by the mentors.

More research is needed to identify the ways in which effective mentoring relationships are formed and maintained. What we have started with this work is a clarification of the ways in which there is considerable potential for mutual professional enhancement to be achieved through the application of an activity often described as a one-way process. Mentoring for administrators is something that benefits all involved parties. It is more than a passing fad.

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